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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S20000044)
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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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August 21, 1979

TO: The Acting Secretary

FROM: HA - Stephen B. Cohen, Acting

SUBJECT: Embassy Buenos Aires Cable on Clandestine Prisons

Embassy Buenos Aires was asked to comment on reports that there might exist in Argentina clandestine prison facilities where unacknowledged prisoners are held or killed. Because their reply is fairly lengthy and complex, we have prepared the following summary of the Embassy's findings:

1. During the past, there have been numerous first-hand accounts of clandestine centers for interrogation and holding of the "disappeared".

2. The Embassy possesses no first-hand account of detention in a clandestine center which took place after 1977. This probably reflects the fact that the GOA has released first those survivors who disappeared earliest.

3. The Embassy has received from secondary sources reports of post-1977 detentions in clandestine centers. However, the Embassy does not disclose the dates of the latest detentions so reported.

4. With the reduction in the number of disappearances in 1978 and even further in 1979, it is logical to assume that many centers are no longer needed. The Embassy has verified that at least a number of clandestine centers have been closed. The Embassy is unable to confirm or disprove whether other clandestine centers still exist.

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5. The Embassy has received one report from a military source that some centers may still be operating and killing prisoners. However, it is unable to confirm or to disprove this report.

6. The Embassy believes that,

(a) "the likelihood of there being significant numbers of clandestine prisoners is small. If there are such prisoners they probably number a few hundred at most;

(b) "no extraordinary measures are being taken to prepare for the IAHRC visit".

We agree with Ambassador Castro's recommendation that, in the absence of verified information on the continued existence of clandestine prisons, it would not be helpful to make exceptional representations to the GOA at this time.

However, we remain seriously concerned about reports that some centers still exist where people might be held or killed. In this regard, the Embassy has reported two disappearances on August 5 and August 12, the first reported since mid-May.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely. We are preparing a second cable for the Embassy, asking some questions raised, but not answered, by their initi reply.

DRAFTED:HA:SBCohen:cm:8/21/79

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